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Thursday 4 May 1978 CG NIDC 78/104C

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National Intelligence Daily Cable for Thursday, 4 May 1978. //Slants indicate Noforn// Classification abbreviations precede each paragraph. The NID Cable is for the purpose of informing senior US officials.

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ARGENTINA: Videla's Term Extended

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//The decision by Argentina's ruling junta to extend President Videla's term and remove the office of the presidency from the junta has temporarily papered over a longstanding dispute over the organization of the government. The move leaves unexplained the role of the president and probably presages a period of intense maneuvering within the military.//

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//The governing junta announced late Tuesday that Videla, Commander in Chief of the Army, will retire from active duty by 1 August but remain as chief executive until March 1981. Technically, Videla will thus serve as a civilian president, although his constituency will clearly be the military.//

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//The announcement left unclear, however, the crucial question of whether the office of the presidency will be subordinate to or independent of the junta. Videla wants to strengthen the office but has been consistently opposed by junta member Admiral Massera, Commander of the Navy. Massera's intransigence is perhaps the main reason the decision was so long in coming; the issue had been hotly debated for well over a year.//

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//The politically ambitious Massera has been strongly critical of the tone and style of Videla's leadership. Massera has consistently used his junta position and popularity within the Navy to block Videla's initiatives and generate opposition to him, in and out of the Navy.//

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//Since the action required a unanimous junta vote, it may have involved some conciliatory gesture toward Massera. He may have been promised some change in the government's economic policy, of which he has been a vocal critic. The Admiral may simply have recognized, however, that he faced overwhelming odds.//

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//The issue probably is not dead. Massera and other dissidents probably do not have the power to undo the changes, but they could hamper the effectiveness of the re-vamped presidency.

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